



Successful Program for Teenagers to Quit Smoking

Public Health Problem

Every year, more than 400,000 people die prematurely from diseases caused by smoking or other forms of tobacco use. Approximately 80% of adult smokers started smoking before age 18, and nearly 70% of adult smokers want to stop smoking but need help to quit permanently.

Taking Action

The American Lung Association's (ALA) quit smoking program for teens, Not on Tobacco (NOT), was proven successful for students in urban schools. It had not been tested in rural areas until West Virginia University's Prevention Research Center completed a 5-year project to test NOT among teens in rural Appalachian schools.

While evaluating the program's effectiveness, the researchers explored the relationship between smoking and mental health among adolescents. The NOT Program engaged teens in group sessions led by trained facilitators during school hours. More than 250 participating students learned techniques to reduce stress, handle peer pressure, control nicotine cravings, eat well, and engage in regular exercise. After three months, the quit rate of smoking was almost four times higher for students in the program than for those who were not.

Implications and Impact

Based on these positive results, many participating schools are maintaining the program. The ALA is also expanding the program to other schools in Appalachian states. NOT is now used in 47 states, and nearly 33,000 teens participated in NOT from 1999 through 2003. Furthermore, the University of North Carolina's Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention is collaborating with its West Virginia colleagues on similar projects with American Indian communities in North Carolina, where smoking rates are among the highest in the nation. The program recently received nationwide recognition when the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) designated it a "model program." SAMHSA will now support the provision of "materials, training, and technical assistance for nationwide implementation" of the program.

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